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FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE

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TAGS: SOCI TBIO AMED MI

SUBJECT: MALAWI CONFIRMS FIRST H1N1 SWINE FLU CASE

Ref: Warner/Gwyn email 9/4

¶1. On Friday, September 4, positive laboratory results from an individual in Malawi indicated the country's first confirmed case of Influenza A H1N1 (swine flu). Samples from seven individuals suspected of being infected were collected and sent to the South African National Institute for Communicable Diseases, a WHO approved testing center for Influenza A H1N1. Positive tests confirmed infection in one individual. The confirmed case involved a young adult male traveling from South Africa and entering Malawi on August 24 from Mozambique at a land border in Ntcheu district.

¶2. After samples were taken, the seven individuals were provided information about H1N1 and advised to monitor their health over the next several days before being permitted to continue freely into Malawi. Ministry of Health (MOH) Principle Secretary Chris Kang'ombe said on September 8 that the infected individual resides in a village in Mangochi district and that he was treated with Tamiflu, though it is unclear the degree to which the MOH is able to track the case.

¶3. The Malawi governments response was initially delayed because the key leaders involved in leading the response effort were away from Lilongwe. The Ministry of Health is now engaged and has issued a public statement confirming the reported case. CDC Malawi is coordinating closely with the Ministry of Health as the Government of Malawi implements its tracking and response effort to this first confirmed case. Their efforts have also been coordinated with CDC headquarters.

¶4. Embassy Lilongwe is well stocked with Tamiflu and personal protective equipment for Mission personnel. The Embassy Health Unit is following guidance from M/Med that only patients with severe illness that may require hospitalization, or patients in high risk categories be tested for H1N1 or treated with Tamiflu. The Embassy will release a Warden Notice indicating that the GOM has confirmed the positive case and informing community members where to find additional information

¶5. Comment: The first confirmed case of H1N1 virus in Malawi shows that the surveillance system put into place by the MOH successfully identified the entry of the disease into the country. We are disappointed by the slow response by the government of Malawi to this confirmation and will continue work closely with them to improve the weaknesses this case has highlighted in Malawi's health care delivery system. It is too early at this time to project just what the impact of swine flu will be in Malawi now that it has arrived. We will take all prudent precautions to maintain the health of Mission staff and to ensure that all amcits receive appropriate information. End comment.

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